UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

ACC

Administrative Committee on Coordination

ACC/1997/3
3 April 1997

ENGLISH ONLY

INTER-AGENCY COMMITTEE ON
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

REPORT OF THE ACC SUBCOMMITTEE ON OCEANS AND COASTAL AREAS ON ITS FIFTH SESSION

(Washington, D.C., 7-10 January 1997)

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I. MATTERS BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF THE INTER-AGENCY COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. The ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas held its fifth session at the headquarters of the World Bank at Washington, D.C., from 7 to 10 January 1997, and draws to the attention of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) the following:

(a) Regarding institutional arrangements for the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (A/51/116, annex II), the Subcommittee confirmed its agreement that the Programme of Action and its future implementation plan would constitute the cooperative programme framework for chapter 17, programme areas A and B of Agenda 21. The Subcommittee also reiterated its interest in being designated the inter-agency steering committee for the Programme of Action, including functions associated with the clearing-house, if so invited by the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Initial comments were made on a draft work plan for inter-agency contributions to the Programme of Action during 1997-1999, which would be reviewed and updated during the inter-sessional period. If required, an ad hoc meeting to review inter-agency planning for the implementation of the Programme of Action could be held later in 1997, following review of implementation planning by the UNEP Governing Council at its nineteenth session (Nairobi, 27 January-7 February 1997);

(b) Regarding international cooperation and coordination, the Subcommittee paid particular attention to the periodic overall review anticipated in paragraph 2 (a) of recent decisions by the General Assembly in its resolution 51/34 to undertake an annual review and evaluation of developments related to ocean affairs and the law of the sea, as reflected in operative paragraphs 14 and 16 of the resolution. The Subcommittee welcomed the decision contained in operative paragraph 17 of the same resolution to include an agenda item entitled "Ocean and the law of the sea" at the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. Noting that another review had been anticipated in paragraphs 7 (c) and 10 of Assembly resolution 51/189, the Subcommittee wished to alert IACSD to the possible need to streamline the various reports and associated intergovernmental reviews. At the same time, the Subcommittee noted the need to receive from IACSD further endorsement and more specific guidance on the suggestions made by the Subcommittee at its fourth session (see ACC/1996/8, paras. 1 (b) and 17) concerning ways and means to improve its effectiveness and the methodology to be used in preparing periodic reviews and reports;

(c) The Subcommittee decided that its future work plan would include as priority items the review of progress made in implementation of the Programme of Action; planning for celebration of the International Year of the Ocean, 1998; and progress in producing a United Nations ocean atlas. Taking into account its future work plan, the Subcommittee agreed to hold its sixth session during the week of 19 January 1998, preferably at Lisbon in view of the launching of the International Year of the Ocean, 1998 and Expo '98;

(d) The Subcommittee, chaired by Ms. T. Melvasalo (UNEP), unanimously agreed that Mr. I. Steiner (United Nations) be confirmed as its Vice-Chairperson, following the appointment of Mr. M. Hayashi to new functions at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The Subcommittee expressed its deep appreciation to Mr. S. Garcia (FAO) for the leadership and devotion he had demonstrated in his role as Chairperson of the Subcommittee from its establishment through the end of 1996.

II. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

A. Opening of the session

2. In her opening remarks, the Chairperson expressed appreciation to the World Bank for the arrangements it had made as host organization. Recalling decisions it had made at the fourth session on the designation of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, the Subcommittee unanimously agreed that Mr. I. Steiner (United Nations) be confirmed as its Vice-Chairperson, following the appointment of Mr. M. Hayashi to new functions at FAO.

3. The former Chairperson, Mr. S. Garcia of FAO, was invited to share with members his views of the work accomplished to date, including an analysis of positive and negative aspects over the past three years.

4. Mr. S. Lintner, Principal Environmental Specialist of the World Bank, welcomed participants on behalf of the Bank, and expressed the hope that debate during the session would lead to effective and action-oriented decisions upon which better inter-agency collaboration could be built. He emphasized the importance, at a time when Governments were expecting the United Nations system to do more with less, of concentrating on a small number of well-defined programmes in which joint action would increase the impact of work undertaken.

B. Agenda, timetable and documentation

5. The Secretary presented the draft agenda, documentation and a proposed timetable for the session. The list of participants is contained in annex I, the agenda as adopted in annex II.

C. Inter-agency review of implementation planning for the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities

6. The Chairperson recalled that, in accordance with a decision made at the fourth session of the Subcommittee, an informal meeting had been arranged in London from 6 to 8 November 1996 to provide an opportunity for inter-agency review of planning for the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, as well as for further preparation of the fifth session.

7. The Chairperson also referred to three reports[1] that had been discussed in draft form at the above-mentioned informal meeting, which would be before the UNEP Governing Council at its forthcoming session. The attention of the Subcommittee was drawn to the recently adopted General Assembly resolution 51/189 on institutional arrangements for the implementation of the Programme of Action.

8. Suggestions had been made at the informal meeting for some editorial changes to improve the above-mentioned reports, in particular concerning the potential role of the Subcommittee as the inter-agency consultative body for the Programme of Action, including the proposed functions of a steering committee. As to the methodology followed in developing such reports, in particular that of ACC in reporting to the UNEP Governing Council, the Subcommittee emphasized that direct communication between the designated focal points of the Subcommittee would be necessary if it were to effectively assume its proposed responsibilities as an inter-agency consultation mechanism. It was recalled that specific changes had been proposed to paragraphs 15 and 16 of the draft ACC report to clarify that the Subcommittee had confirmed its interest in both the inter-agency consultative role and that of steering committee for the Programme of Action.

9. The Subcommittee noted that, for reasons of timing, it had not been possible to include the proposed changes in the final versions of the above-mentioned reports, but that they could be taken into account by the UNEP Governing Council and in future documentation.

10. Reservations expressed at the fourth session of the Subcommittee concerning additional responsibilities that might fall upon agencies were reiterated; it was emphasized that any new activities in support of the Programme of Action would have to be approved by the governing body of each agency. The responsibility of Governments to raise those questions and other related financial issues, as forecast in paragraphs 4, 5 and 9 of Assembly resolution 51/189, was emphasized.

11. Accordingly, the Subcommittee supported the action proposed for the establishment of the clearing-house mechanism for the Programme of Action and the series of regional workshops forecast during 1997 and 1998. A draft inter-agency work plan for the implementation of the Programme of Action during 1997-1999 was discussed, and would be maintained under review during the inter-sessional period.

12. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) offered to work with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) on oils (hydrocarbons) and litter, and with FAO on nutrients and sediment mobilization, and suggested that the international mussel watch experiment could contribute to the monitoring of persistent organic pollutants. The potential for linking the regional workshops to regional assessments of the state of the ocean and coastal waters was noted. It was agreed that invitations from UNEP to agencies to attend the regional workshops should be sent directly to the focal points of the Subcommittee, even if other channels of communication were also used. This would facilitate the identification of appropriate agency representation at those important regional workshops.

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13. The Subcommittee reiterated its interest in being designated the inter-agency steering committee for the Programme of Action if so invited by the UNEP Governing Council.

D. Activities of the Subcommittee with respect to the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21

14. The focal point for Subcommittee activities within the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat introduced document E/CN.17/1997/2/Add.16, pointing out that it constituted the concise report on chapter 17 of Agenda 21 that would be presented to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session, and would form part of the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21.

15. The Subcommittee expressed its satisfaction with the report, and expressed its appreciation to the Department for the work that it had undertaken to harmonize the contribution of the Subcommittee with contributions on other chapters.

16. Recalling discussion at its informal meeting on the desirability of establishing closer links between the work of the Subcommittee and the governmental and non-governmental communities, the Subcommittee agreed that an informal briefing session could be organized during the forthcoming meeting of the Commission's Ad Hoc Inter-sessional Working Group (24 February-7 March 1997). The representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) offered to make room arrangements (for about 40 people), taking into account the timing of debate concerning chapter 17. The representatives of the United Nations, UNDP, IOC, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and UNEP indicated their interest in participating. IOC was designated the lead agency to coordinate the briefing session.

E. International Year of the Ocean, 1998

17. The representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)/IOC introduced discussion of the International Year of the Ocean, 1998, referring to documents ACC-SC/21.17-V/6, 6 Add.1, and 7; he reminded the Subcommittee that planning for celebration of the Year had initially been discussed by the Intersecretariat Committee on Scientific Programmes Relating to Oceanography in 1995. During the ensuing period, a number of initiatives had been identified, as contained in the background documentation. He also recalled that UNESCO was to submit a work plan to the Economic and Social Council on the matter, and suggested that the activities identified in document ACC-SC/21.17-V/6 and those suggested at the current session of the Subcommittee could form the basis of such a work plan. The UNESCO representative emphasized that the Year offered a unique opportunity to raise awareness of oceans and coastal areas, and eventually secure greater governmental commitment to addressing ocean issues.

18. The Subcommittee voiced its strong support for the initiatives taken to date, and agreed to the approach proposed to take advantage of activities planned for the period of July 1997-July 1999 by associating them with the Year. Several levels could be envisaged: dedication of an event to the Year; dissemination of public information by making use of the logo; or association with the Year of an activity that would have taken place anyway. One criteria for inclusion of an activity in the inter-agency list would be its regional or international character. Members agreed to submit additions to the list by the end of February 1997 to ensure their inclusion in the work plan to be submitted to the Council.

19. Recalling that IOC had offered to include activities of the Subcommittee on its Internet home page, the Subcommittee requested IOC to develop a layout for their contribution that could be used by agencies, as well as Governments, non-governmental organizations etc., in order to provide a special focus on the Year.

20. Considerable discussion was generated by the draft proposal (document ACC-SC/21.17-V/7) presented by FAO to develop a United Nations ocean atlas in a digitized format, which would be made available in CD-ROM format as well as on the Internet. The representative of FAO recalled the background of the project, which had evolved from a similar FAO endeavour in the field of agriculture, fisheries and forestry, and recalled that a demonstration had been arranged at an informal meeting of the Subcommittee in London, during which the former Chairperson had presented updated information on possible association with private enterprise and related financing questions.

21. Noting that the project would constitute a major contribution by the United Nations system to providing information and raising public awareness, the Subcommittee decided to include development of a United Nations ocean atlas as one of its cooperative programme frameworks. FAO was designated lead agency; IOC, UNEP, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), UNDP and the World Bank agreed to join the project at the joint implementation level; and the United Nations, IMO and WMO were designated participating agencies. An editorial board composed of the lead and joint implementation agencies was established, and agreed to meet, preferably during the week of 10 February 1997, at Warwick, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, or in Rome. In the meantime, all members were asked to submit to FAO a preliminary indication of the contributions they could offer, especially graphic material and maps emanating from their respective programmes. Due note was taken of the need to produce an initial version of the atlas by 1998, within the context of the Year, concentrating on regions where information and assessment were most advanced. The need to include human development questions and to make use of indicators was also recognized.

F. Methods of work of the Subcommittee

22. The Secretary recalled the methodology agreed upon by the Subcommittee at its first session, which was based on the designation of lead, participating and associated agencies for each of the subprogrammes within chapter 17 of Agenda 21. Referring to the analysis made by the former Chairperson, she noted

that communication among members and their responses to requests by the Chairperson for input could be made more efficient.

23. In discussing ways to improve the methods of work of the Subcommittee, members emphasized the importance of operating within an agreed inter-sessional work plan with a clear indication of activities, goals, timing and responsibility. The common use of electronic mail was also emphasized as an aid to rapid communication and as a means of keeping members informed on matters of mutual interest.

24. Taking into account the three priority activities identified for the period 1997-1998 (the International Year of the Ocean, 1998; review of implementation planning for the Programme of Action; and development of a United Nations ocean atlas), the Subcommittee agreed to develop a more detailed work plan through correspondence as those activities evolved.

25. As to the planning of its sessions, the Subcommittee emphasized that appropriate background documentation must be provided by the lead agency for each agenda item, preferably in advance, so that discussion could focus on policy decisions and well-defined action.

26. As a first step in that direction, the Subcommittee agreed that the following items, with the lead agency indicated, should be included within the provisional agenda of its sixth session:

(a) International Year of the Ocean, 1998 (IOC);

(b) Review of implementation planning for the Programme of Action (UNEP);

(c) Development of a United Nations ocean atlas (FAO).

G. Cooperative programme frameworks

27. The Secretary introduced this item by recalling that cooperative programme frameworks had been endorsed by the Subcommittee as a basis for its work in addressing implementation of the subprogrammes within chapter 17 of Agenda 21. Although considerable progress had been made in subprogrammes A and B through the Programme of Action, attention was drawn to the need to identify any outstanding action required for the whole of chapter 17.

28. Having reviewed all the elements of chapter 17, the Subcommittee agreed that in addition to the Programme of Action (Subprogrammes A and B), cooperative programme frameworks should be developed as a priority for the United Nations ocean atlas, the International Year of the Ocean and the Subcommittee home page on the Internet; frameworks should include identification of activities, designation of responsibilities, consideration of financial questions and a time-frame.

29. To clarify the potential role of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in providing financial assistance, an official of the GEF secretariat presented an overview of the International Waters Component, emphasizing the possibilities

offered through agreed-upon priorities for transboundary conditions and contaminants, both of which were of particular relevance to the Programme of Action.

30. The Subcommittee agreed that although cooperative programme frameworks would continue as a conceptual basis for its work, future agendas would be based on implementation of the subprogrammes within chapter 17 as they were progressively addressed.

31. Noting the opportunities available through GEF for financial assistance, as well as its constraints, the Subcommittee encouraged closer cooperation with the GEF secretariat so as to mutually explore needs and resources.

H. Other matters

32. The representative of UNESCO/IOC provided updated information on the draft treaty proposed by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), one part of which might have negative repercussions on the free flow of scientific data and maintenance of scientific databases for international programmes. Having noted that a decision on part III of the draft treaty, which was most relevant to scientific data concerns, had been deferred, the Subcommittee requested IOC to keep members informed of developments and alert them to any action that might be required.

33. A draft version of the global freshwater assessment, to be presented to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session, was made available, as agreed to at the 1996 ad hoc meeting. Identification of work of mutual interest would be communicated to the Chairperson of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources. The Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas agreed that its Chairperson, or if not feasible, a member of the Subcommittee, should participate in relevant discussions at the eighteenth session of the Subcommittee on Water Resources (Vienna, 30 September-4 October 1997).

34. The representative of UNDP reported on a 12 October 1996 meeting at IOC in Paris, which UNDP and the Swedish International Development Agency had organized for 15 donors and organizations. The meeting had reviewed possibilities for common methodology and indicators for learning from integrated coastal management initiatives. UNDP would be funding a survey of existing indicators and instruments to measure such initiatives. Members were requested to advise UNDP by the end of February 1997 if their agency had relevant indicators and instruments that should be taken into account in the survey.

I. Adoption of the report

35. Taking into account its future work plan, in particular the need to review progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action, planning for celebration of the International Year of the Ocean, 1998, and progress in producing a United Nations ocean atlas, the Subcommittee agreed to hold its sixth session during the week of 19 January 1998, preferably at Lisbon. It was anticipated that an ad hoc meeting could be arranged to provide a mid-year

review of progress made in implementation of the work plan (tentative place and dates: Stockholm, 6-8 August 1998, to precede the International Water Symposium to be held at Stockholm from 10 to 15 August 1998).

36. The Subcommittee adopted the report on its fifth session.

Notes

[1] ACC report to the UNEP Governing Council on international cooperation in the field of the environment; report on the technical meeting on the Programme of Action's clearinghouse; and a report on institutional arrangements for implementation of the Programme of Action.

Annex I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Chairperson: T. Melvasalo
(United Nations Environment Programme)

Vice-Chairperson: I. Steiner
(United Nations)

Secretary: N. Philippon-Tulloch
(Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)

United Nations, its entities and programmes

United Nations	A. Rogers[a] Ismat A. Steiner
United Nations Environment Programme	T. Melvasalo
United Nations Development Programme	P. Reynolds

Specialized agencies and related organizations

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	S. Garcia[b] H. Naeve
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	G. Kullenberg
Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission	G. Kullenberg
World Bank	S. Lintner M. Hatziolos
World Meteorological Organization	P. Dexter
International Maritime Organization	D. Du
International Atomic Energy Agency	M. S. Baxter

[a] Focal point for Subcommittee activities within the United Nations Secretariat.

[b] Former Chairperson.

Annex II

AGENDA

1. Opening.

2. Agenda, timetable and documentation.

3. Inter-agency review of implementation planning for the global programme of action for the protection of the marine environment from the land-based activities.

4. Activities of the Subcommittee with respect to the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21.

5. International Year of the Ocean, 1998.

6. Methods of work of the Subcommittee.

7. Cooperative programme frameworks.

8. Other matters.

9. Adoption of the report and closure.